

Interview with Mrs. Elna Wenzel
Conducted by Dr. James L. Dodson and
Miss Paula Boyer

Conducted on October 4, 1976

TAPE 2

DODSON: We were asking you about the flood in 1938.
You recall whether there was excessive rain
fall or...

WENZEL: Yes...

DODSON: What...

WENZEL: ...it was and this man came home and he said to
me, he says, "I just saw something that I've
never seen in my life." And he said the house
collapsed and went into the river and that was
at the Universal City there. So, I said,
"Well, I better get out and look around." And
I went out to the front and of the house and
that faced South and that was the Tujunga Wash.
And it was kind of an island there and there's
a little park there. And my son's children was
in the high school so we got in the car and was
going to get the children home from high
school. And we got up to, Chandler Boulevard

there at the park- at the point of the park- that's just at the other side of Tujunga. And the water was coming down that Tujunga Wash. It was just something terrible. The electric light polls were just swinging in the air so we couldn't get to the high school to get the children. And we felt well, they'd be taken care of there. They wouldn't let them out. And because there was no way that they could get home.

WENZEL:

So we went home and we stood out in front of the place. We saw 32 houses go down into this wash. One right after the other. And they collapsed just like a match box. And then we had the 40 acres up on Victory Boulevard and my brother was up there and he couldn't get home and that water went through well, from Coldwater Canyon out to Whitsett...all through there and on down. As it came down more, it spread out. The damage wasn't done... but it really was a bad thing. And I know my brother couldn't get home. He had to walk home. And he was just frightened that we wouldn't be there and I know that we were- Dr. Thompson had made all plans to evacuate us...and the

house across the street was undermined from us in that flood. So, I well remember that flood.

DODSON: Do you remember whether the business district of North Hollywood was damaged?

WENZEL: No. No, it was only the other side- not too far from the business...

DODSON: Wash?

WENZEL: ...t- town- the village. You know, the buildings of North Hollywood- city- but... it really did come down something terrible. And I know the - some of the homes along the west end of the park, they were pretty well hurt in there, but oh, that was awful. It was terrible.

DODSON: Has that been fixed now with flood control projects so it doesn't happen anymore?

WENZEL: They don't have the floods anymore, but they - Tujunga Wash and this wash here between Burbank and Van Nuys would used to flow something terrible and then the one out at Coldwater Canyon and it comes down through Chandler in

through there from up in the valley. That just flowed something terrible in all into the Los Angeles River. And the- it just roared. See then we had lots of rains that- early years, but see now, the flood controls come in and that has all been taken care of and the town of Van Nuys used to suffer terrible with the flood waters too. But that town was kind of in a woo-spot there.

BOYER: Were there any lives lost during that flood?

WENZEL: Pardon?

BOYER: Were there any lives lost during the flood?

WENZEL: Not to- that I recall...

BOYER: No? Everybody got...

WENZEL: ...No. ...got out...

WENZEL: ...But they got out in time, but to see those beautiful homes go down just crumbled up like match boxes. Awful.

DODSON: Now was that the last big flood we had in the valley?

WENZEL: Yes, that was the last. And but just below the Weddingtons owned that property at that time and they subdivided it, but I think that the... Park now is a little park in there now. But that was awful.

DODSON: At the present time we hear a lot about minorities and integration and bussing and all of that sort of thing. Do you recall when you were in school whether there was any agitation of that type? Or any agitation of that type in the history of the valley? About minorities and minority rights?

WENZEL: No. No there wasn't anything like that. No.

BOYER: Well, when did the Japanese that came in and helped with the crops during...

WENZEL: They were came in...

BOYER: ...World War I?

WENZEL: ...from Los Angeles.

BOYER: They came from L.A.

WENZEL: You see they did come in and picked the fruit.
And then they would stay until and do the
pruning of the trees and that was...

BOYER: But they lived down in Los Angeles.

WENZEL: Yes.

BOYER: Nobody came in- they didn't come and...

WENZEL: No.

BOYER: ...settle in here.

WENZEL: There's some of them that came though. We had
one that stayed with us all the time and we
kept him busy doing different things. But we
had at least seven Japanese working all the
time in the summer time. But as time went on
why there was more of a settlement around with
the Japanese. And I know there was when the Chinese-
they raised asparagus out in the valley. We
knew of them, but, that was it.

BOYER: Were there very many Mexican-Americans? Living in the valley? Still? Or were they...

WENZEL: Well, there was Mexicans, yes. And they would we had them working for us and they'd camp along the river at the- our place would run into the river and they would all would camp there in tents and raised vegetables. And I had a call from one of the Mexican boys who was five years old when his dad worked for us and he recognized my picture and the name and he told me the other day and he's 71 now.

DODSON: I think before we began taping, you mentioned Gypsies in the valley? Do you recall that they came here very much?

WENZEL: Well, they'd come around at certain times of the years. And I know we kids were scared to death of them. And I know- they'd camp at the bottom of this Cahuenga Pass there at the- and my sister coming home from high school why she was frightened with the gypsies and they'd come and they's want to bale hay and something you know for the horses, but they were, you know- they wasn't what you'd call dangerous or

anything like that, but they would help themselves to things...appreciated.

DODSON: Did you know personally any of the important pioneers in the valley? You mentioned that your father knew a number of them. Did you know some of the descendants of some of the early pioneers?

WENZEL: Well, the pioneers that were- was the Weddingtons, and the Wilcoxes and the Batemans, and Caharts, Lankershims, Witleys, Whitsett, and Chandlers. I didn't know all of them personally, but I've seen them all because I had to take my Dad around and when they were subdividing the valley, they would come to dad- Whitsett and Witley and all of them and the people were sitting out there orchards would go to Charlie Freeburg. And Charlie Freeburg was set out more than one fruit orchard in the valley and that way I would see them, but to, you know, be real acquainted with them why Dad was the one who was more acquainted with all of them then what I would be.

DODSON: The Lankershim's ranch foreman, Mr. Francisco Avilar is still alive. I wonder if your father

knew him by any chance. Do you ever hear his name mentioned? Avilar?

WENZEL: Oh, I don't know. I don't recall. Where's he in the valley or?

DODSON: Yes. He still lives here on Mission Boulevard in the San Fernando district - or the Mission Hills district he probably is.

WENZEL: No, I don't know of him. Dad would probably, but I wouldn't know. (Slight pause) He wasn't born here in the valley?

DODSON: No.

WENZEL: No.

DODSON: I think he came from Arizona here...and then was employed by...

WENZEL; Yes.

DODSON: ...the Lankershim family.

WENZEL: Yeah. Uh-huh.

DODSON: You mentioned some of these important names. Are any of their descendants still alive that you know of?

WENZEL: Well, I don't know, they're kind of scattered. They the Batemans have a daughter and the Weddingtons- there was Mile Weddington and that's Guy Weddington's children. And I don't know of many of them now that is around. There was several. There was the Littlefield family. I had a call from one of them and they were one of the early pioneers and I haven't seen the girl in- I don't know- in...but there's still some of them around. The Noble family- they were one of the old timers that they're not living here in the valley. They're living up in Arroyo Grande- up there- that's the Noble's boy. There is Vernon and what is the other boy's name? Well - one of the younger boys. But most of them are scattered. I still have a sister here and then one sister in Camarillo- I had the two sisters, but the others are scattered- I wouldn't know all.

DODSON: Can you tell us about any important historic sites, or buildings, or monuments, in this

particular area? Do we have any of the old houses still standing that you know of?

WENZEL: The Weddington's home- that, the first one they built, that's on Weddington Avenue down near Vineland Avenue. And our home is still in the Taluca Lake there.

BOYER: On

WENZEL: Yes.

DODSON: Where- where is that located exactly?

WENZEL: That's located on Ledge and Wimple. They moved it. Dad paid \$6,000.00 for the house when he built it. And, they bought I think for \$600.00 and they remodeled it. You know, changed it around. I had the pleasure of going through it. But it was quite interesting to see it- how they remodeled it and it was the home that had many enjoyable events in it. Dad- we kids could stay down stairs, we could sing, play the piano, make all the noise we wanted and he was upstairs asleep and we could hear him snoring away just like the roar. It was a beautiful home.

DODSON: Has the remodeling changed it's appearance much? Or have they retained the general lines of it? Did you recognize it well?

WENZEL: Oh, I recognized it all. They had a side entrance that we didn't have. They, the front was cobble stones and then they made it more of a mission style plastered over the cobble stones. And only heating that we had in the house was two fireplaces and the wood stove and they put in a couple of fireplaces upstairs for heat and- it- the pantry was put into a dinette and the stairway- the back stairway and part of the back porch was a walk-in freezer. And where we had our kurtzen table that was now the drain board in the sink, but the stove was- well, we had the old wood stove.

DODSON: The outside of the house looks very much as it did except for this side entrance?

WENZEL: The right side entrance and they put a slide door at the front entrance and that went out to the swimming pool.

DODSON: Do you know of any other historic houses or building? That are still standing? In Taluca Lake or Burbank?

WENZEL: No. No, they've torn down things that - they haven't saved anything that I can recall - much, you know, of the old buildings. Dr. Thompson here in Burbank, I was told the other day, that his first home- I don't know if you know Dr. Thompson, but he was one of our famous doctors here and his home- first home that he had- they wanted to keep it as an historical place but they had no place to put it so they tore it down. So, there you are.

DODSON: That happens so often.

WENZEL: Yes and that- I think is what happened with a lot of things. It's- might have been kept one of the old churches or something like that you know. It might have been nice to have. It would have taken such a little spot of land to put it on. I thought it would have been nice that they'd kept one of the churches.

DODSON: Right. Now we've been asking you about various things, we wonder if you've got some anecdotes,

or history, or something of the kind that we haven't asked you about that you think should be recorded for the future.

WENZEL: Well, you know, they have these streets named after different people like Blakesley, McCormick, Klump, and there's Bateman Avenue, but they never- I don't put those- like my dad, they wanted to name a street after him.

DODSON: Don't you kind of wish they had now when you think about it?

WENZEL: No. I don't think so. I like Valley Spring Lane and it was the wish of my dad and what he would want should have, you know... But now Idens- they had- Studio City- owned that land and now the Batemans and all of them, I think those pioneers names should be made a list of and put down.

DODSON: This was a project we've been thinking about doing. But we have to find out the history of each one of these streets. Now we have dug up last year the history of some of them and who they referred to, but I think that would be a very worthwhile hunt- project.

WENZEL:

Yeah, I think so too. Now, Blakesley, you know, that was our doctor. And he was, I think, about the first doctor that came in to the valley in the North Hollywood out there and he was blind and his daughter went around with him. He wasn't told that he was blind, but she went with him, but she went with him. And then McCormick they had the livery stable. The first one was on Magnolia there between Lankershim Boulevard and Vineland. And then they moved on to Lankershim Boulevard and that is on the corner of Losito and the cross street and Lankershim Boulevard. And the Batemans- they were one of the ranchers like my dad. And the Idens- they were the ones that had fruit. And now the Killion place and that was the principal of our school. Let's see, who else was it. The Weddingtons, well, they named the street, but you know the Weddingtons- you can plenty of history of them. They were the first ones. Then you have the first post office. As I say, I guess I didn't say it- till you this, the first mail that came into the valley you had to go down to the little town of Colegrove, North Hollywood to pick up your mail and that was on Sunset- no- was it Santa Monica- Sunset Boulevard and Cahuenga Avenue.

DODSON: Oh was that a separate little town?

WENZEL: That was Colegrove then- in the early days. So that was where you went to pick up your mail. In the early- real earlier days, of course, we our mail delivery when I was born and all that, but in the earlier days you had to go to the little town of Colegrove to get the mail.

DODSON: Well, I can imagine they didn't go every day then if they...

WENZEL: No...

DODSON: ...had to travel clear over there.

WENZEL: ...No, I don't think they got enough mail to bother. But I- I think that it would be nice if they would have a name and the history of a lot of the people. There was the Klump family. Now, Klump Street, well, they were ranchers and a wonderful family and things like that. But they could, you know, have all the names of different ones, but maybe I could rig up a little bit more, but it's a- interesting.

DODSON: Do you recall how this community, Burbank, got its name?

WENZEL: Well, that was from the Burbank. The you know, I think you know.

DODSON: It was my understanding that it really wasn't named for the naturalist Burbank, but for some other...

WENZEL: Yes.

DODSON: ...man by that name.

WENZEL: Yes. Burbank- it wasn't much of a place. It was- it started to bloom when Lockheed came in. Because they had the old wooden walks there in the town until '42. It wasn't until World War II that Lockheed came in.

DODSON: Do you feel that Lockheed has been very important in the...

WENZEL: Oh yes.

DODSON: ...history of Burbank?

WENZEL: That really made Burbank I think because they had the Marman factory here that made the trucks that was on Alameda and San Fernando Road. There wasn't very many factories. They had the cosmetic where they manufactured soaps and things, but there wasn't really anything until Lockheed came in.

DODSON: Now there's quite a controversy at the present time over the Hollywood Burbank Airport - the Lockheed Airport.

WENZEL: Yes.

DODSON: What do you think about that? Would you like to see it stay or be removed?

WENZEL: Well, I'd like to see it stay. I think it should. I don't see why it end.

DODSON: Well, some people are objecting on the ground of noise.

WENZEL: Yes.

DODSON: Does it bother you? Of course your quite a ways from it here.

WENZEL: I'm- a ways from it, but it's bad when the planes do go over, but I think in time to come that they can work that out. In some way, but I don't know what Burbank would do.

DODSON: Well apparently a number of jobs would be lost if that were removed.

WENZEL: Yes, it would you know. And it would hurt Burbank very much though. But Burbank now is getting to be where it is more of retired people too you know. There's a lot of retired people living here in Burbank. But it- it would hurt. It would hurt, but I'd like to see it stay. I know it's very convenient. It would spoil some of my transportation here.

DODSON: Well I think many people that don't live in Burbank are very anxious to have it stay. Of course they don't suffer from noise at all, but...

WENZEL: No, no.

DODSON: ...they get the convenience.

WENZEL: Los Angeles, well- I think- it'll all work out. I don't see why not. But I'd hate to see it close down. It makes you feel kind of badly.

DODSON: I see. You have any suggestions on people that you know that would- that you think we should interview who might be able to give us some more information about the valley?

WENZEL: No, I don't know of anybody that could help you out. They the ones who are here are younger than I am, but I don't know of anybody that could help you out. I don't know if I helped you out any or not.

DODSON: Well you certainly have Mrs. Wenzel, and we're very grateful for you allowing us to come. We thank you very much for what you have done for us here.

WENZEL: It's a pleasure and I am happy that I've been an pioneer and it- I don't know- it's just something that you look back to- it's beautiful. It's been hard in ways, but it has been - well you can face the world better then lots of people can't.

DODSON: Yes. Do you feel any regrets though at not seeing the fruit and the vegetables and the flowers, and the greenery that once existed here? The open places?

WENZEL: I do miss it. You see, the fruits today is all picked green. And you- it don't have the taste...

DODSON: That's right.

WENZEL: ...as it would you know. It was tree ripened. And when we were when we had the ranch and we picked the fruit- that was picked ripe. It always had a nice color to it. But the first fruit that we put into cold storage, we picked it green and I'm going to tell you that was one of the hardest things that we ever did in our lives. To pick that fruit green... and it ripened up. But it doesn't have the taste and that I miss that very much. And I buy very little fruit in the stores. If I can get out and- I'd go for miles if I could get a peach that I could pick off the tree ripe.

DODSON: Well I suppose there's a good side to. You have these electric lights instead of the gas

lights and telephone and cars, paved roads, and all of that.

WENZEL: It's something and I rode through the old dirt roads, there's the telephone that the first number that- our number was 15. That was our first telephone number.

DODSON: We have, in our museum, a copy of the Los Angeles telephone directory of 1882. I think it has about 90 subscribers.

WENZEL: Yes, I wouldn't be surprised. And then I can remember we had about 51, it was our next phone number. But it's been interesting all the way through.

DODSON: Well, thank you Mrs. Wenzel. We really appreciate very much what you have done for us.

WENZEL: Well thank you.

WENZEL: Dad was down there peddling fruit and there was a tree in the back yard- just a seedling tree and he took a rim off of that and... what are you going to do, tape more?

DODSON: Yes.

WENZEL: And he took a rim of that and he budded the tree at home. And he got the most wonderful peach that ever was. But he didn't get it on the market. And my brother still has a tree and that was up in Mariposa County. And we called it the Freeburg tree. But he didn't get it developed where he could put it on the market.

DODSON: Well, tell us about- again- about the Satsuma? plums and how your father got the letter.

WENZEL: Oh, that was the Santa Rosa.

DODSON: Oh, Santa Rosa?

WENZEL: Santa Rosa plum. Mr. Hall- I think it was Mr. Hall from the Hall - I think they had a big fruit stall on the big Los Angeles market. And they bought the fruit from Dad and he- I think it was Mr. Hall that went to Europe and he sent Dad a card from Europe and addressed it the Santa Rosa king- plum king, Lankershim, California and Dad got that card.

DODSON: Was your father then the first to grow a grove of these plums?

WENZEL: Yes, he was the first one and he four acres of it.

DODSON: And your father's name was?

WENZEL: Carl Alfred Freeburg. Called- called him Charlie Freeburg they called him.

DODSON: And you also told us about the Casaba melon.

WENZEL: Well the Casaba melon- they- the blue packages of seeds were sent to him from New York. And he planted them and it turned out to be the most wonderful Casabas that you ever wanted to eat and it's just a shame that we don't have some of the melons today.

DODSON: They had a, oh, it was gorgeous and it grows so big. And the taste and all was just wonderful. And we had quite a- well, we had- well he planted them on the side hills and they all had to be carried up to the top of the hill where they could pick them up and that was the kids job to carry those Casaba melons. We'd carry

two of them in our arms and maybe sometimes if it wasn't too big we'd have three of them in our arms. And we'd climb up the side of the little hills and they were really wonderful. I just could- my mouth waters for them, but they were really wonderful.

DODSON: And again he was the first to plant that melon...

WENZEL: The Casaba...

DODSON: ...Casaba melon.

WENZEL: Yeah. And then it - down and all we have now it is the small ones and we call them the Casaba and that's all you get today. It's just like the cantaloupes and everything it's running out the water melons. It's not like they used to be. I don't know why it is, but they all seem to have such a better taste to them. Maybe just because I could go out and pick up one. Enjoying- pick one, drop it down, just take the heart out and then go on and leave it, so those melons were wonderful.

DODSON: Your father was primarily interested in fruit growing then?

WENZEL: Yes, very much so. And he has one medal and my brothers have then- two. He was the first one to have a little asparagus field here in the valley. And when they, Universal City, Toluca Lake opened up and they sold the ranch, it took six mules to get those roots out of the ground because then back- digging those deep trenches to put those roots in and then, of course, you had them mound up and, oh, the asparagus then was- it was so good to get out and cut them. Then my brother- he had ten acres of asparagus. I think- his and then there were two Chinamen that...

DODSON: What other sorts of fruit did your father raise that you recall?

WENZEL: Well, he had about mostly- when he went into himself, the - peaches, walnuts, and apricots and things like that. And then, as my brothers went out to farming, why they specialized in corn and vegetables. And the one brother, he specialized in the corn and the other, he specialized in melons and we had the roadside stand on Victory Boulevard. On the 40 acres

there, why we had strawberries, and the peaches, asparagus and berries - different kinds. And that way why everything was so ripe there on the road. And we had a very large crowd of people that came from distance to- who thought it was so nice and all. Tomatoes and everything that they raised there. Mother always said the boysenberries looked like turkey eggs they were so big, but, they had a special fertilizer that they put into the water and that just seemed to develop the root so that it was just beautiful. The color and everything thing was wonderful on it.

DODSON: Where was your father's land located exactly?

WENZEL: On Victory? From Coldwater Canyon to half way to Whitsett. He had 40 acres in there.

DODSON: I see. And then that was sold to be subdivided...

WENZEL: That was...

DODSON: ...was it?

WENZEL: ...sold to be subdivided. Yeah, it was all sold before the price of land came up.

DODSON: Well that unfortunately has happened to a great many people.

WENZEL: Yes. You see now we had that, what would it be? You don't find it now around very much.

DODSON: Do you know some of the early pioneers in Hawaii have avoided that happening. They lease their land- they don't sell it.

WENZEL: Yes.

DODSON: And then, of course, if it increases in value, they get it back after a certain period from the lease holder and they can lease it again for a higher price the next time around...

WENZEL: Yes.

DODSON: ...the descendants.

WENZEL: Uh-huh. Well I think up in the - one party came here the other night and talking to me and wanted to know if I could tell them of a house

that was built over here on Camarillo and he was from Petaluma and in some way, you know, Petaluma that's noted for the where they raise so many chickens, you know. But they have fixed it so that they can't subdivide. Now, I just don't know how to explain it to you, but the town is small yet, but they can subdivide out in the distance, but they can't come around into the town.

DODSON: Maybe they have zoned it for large lots only so that a person can't cut up his land in small parcels.

WENZEL: Well, and he was saying something about it being the only one out in the...

BOYER: I've heard of that. It was in the news. They were the only town. They voted on it. They decided that they wouldn't be able to...

WENZEL: Subdivide it.

BOYER: ...the town. Yeah.

WENZEL: It has to be in the open.

BOYER: Uh-huh. I remember that.

WENZEL: So that was another call I had.

DODSON: Well, thank you very much Mrs. Wenzel for this additional information.

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